

# The Sun.

## BOOKS AND THE BOOK WORLD

TWELVE  
PAGES

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 1918.

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SECTION  
FIVE

### Out in "The Ghost Garden"

There in the Middle of the Night and the Middle of the Book Something Walks Abroad, Something That Amelie Rives Made to Live Thirty Years Ago

IT says on the jacket of *The Ghost Garden*, by Amelie Rives: "If you care at all for ghost stories, you'll care very much for this!" Everybody cares for ghost stories, even the members of the Society for Psychological Research, and book reviewers have a notorious weakness for them. Reviewers of the better class own country houses, surrounded by whispering pines, to which they repair in the dark of the moon and read, while the rain dashes against the pane and the wind moans in the chimney, the latest ghost story.

Owing to the high cost of travelling to the country, THE SUN's copy of *The Ghost Garden* was read in West Eighty-first street, but the dumb-waiter door, which creaks slightly, was left unlocked and the cold water tap in the bath tub was regulated so as to drip one drop every thirty seconds, a ghostly interval. For a dime the janitor's oldest daughter agreed to utter, upon the hour of midnight, the poignant wail of a soul in torment, shooting the sound up the dumb-waiter. For some reason, perhaps due to the war, she decided to conserve both the dime and the wail. The reading began:

"I s'pose, bein' from the city, you don't believe in 'hants'?" observed Joel Carver, turning from a last fruitless survey of the interlaced branches above them."

That sounded well, to begin a ghost story with, and the reading went right on, introducing Mr. Radford, the hero, to whom Joel put the question, and very soon afterward the old deserted mansion, Her Wish, which was tenanted by the "hant." Her Wish was built in 1766 by old Col. Horsemanden to please his daughter Melany, a haughty beauty, who later loved Geoffrey Branton but refused to marry him because he would not sell his northern possessions (the scene of *The Ghost Garden* is Virginia) and also change his name to Horsemanden. She swore that she would love him forever and, should his spirit enter the body of another, even a century later, she would draw that spirit to her. Well, it is evident that Radford inherited Branton's spirit, for no sooner had he entered the grounds of the old mansion than he began to recognize things. He found his way about a celebrated maze through which none of the natives had been able to go. He saw Melany Horsemanden's grave, which had fresh flowers on it.

#### A Dear Dead Woman.

That night at supper he met another Melany, Warrenger by name, the daughter of a gentleman who brewed Radford a mint julep and told him all about Melany Horsemanden. Melany Warrenger used to shiver and turn pale when the baleful influence of the dead Melany was mentioned, for, although it was she who put the flowers on the grave, she knew that the dead Melany hated her. For one thing, she had had a beautiful voice, and the evil dead Melany had taken it from her. In the next chapter it became evident that the dead Melany would also try to keep the live Melany from winning Mr. Radford. The action crept rapidly along in the book, but the chills did not creep rapidly along the spine of the reviewer. Something was wrong.

What was it? Not with the book in itself, for it



—was well written, but with the reviewer. Here was a triangle drama, with a live woman, a live man and a dead woman; the scenery a beautiful Virginia estate with a rare old house inclosing furniture and pictures and a ghost. But not a thrill, not a chill. Something stood between the book and the reader. It was a ghost. Not the ghost of Melany Horsemanden, which was busily engaged with more romantic persons, but the ghost of a book. Midnight came and, the janitor's daughter having violated her contract, the ghost of the book arrived and walked the room; a book with a gray cover and the date 1888 printed on the title page.

#### The Ghost of 1888.

Eighteen eighty-eight, and Indian summer, and a Sunday afternoon in the Middle West town you came from. The chicken dinner has been disposed of. Mr. Smith is sitting on the front porch, wondering whether the tariff is really a tax, whether the London police will catch the Whitechapel murderer and whether the Hatfields will outlast the McCoys. Mrs. Smith is reading *John Ward, Preacher*. Miss Smith is reading *Miss Lou*, by E. P. Roe. Miss Jennie Smith is reading *Saracinesca*, by Marion Crawford. The hired girl, who has finished the dishes and is off duty for the rest of the day, has gone to her room to read *Mrs. Middleton's Lover*, having failed to borrow Rosa Nouchette Carey's *Only a Governess* from old Mrs. Gurney, who lives next door. Johnny Smith is sitting under the syringa bush reading *Snagged and Sunk*, by Harry Castlemon.

Presently there is a stir on the porch and within the parlor. Roy Livingston, the haberdasher's

clerk, is walking down the other side of Poplar avenue. He is the neighborhood dude. He wears a black clay cutaway, lavender trousers, very tight; a square topped derby, Congress patent leather shoes, a gigantic Ascot tie, white, with purple horseshoes in it. He carries a cane, the handle of which is fashioned after a person's limb. He is a wild blade, known to take a glass of lager on Saturday night. He shoots nervously his circular cuffs. He is bound to the home of Clarysse Macomber, upon whom he is "waiting." When night falls he will sing, in high tenor, "The Maid of the Mill."

In the cottage across from the Smiths' house Mr. Essentrinken, the neighborhood butcher, is reading admiringly to his wife from the speech of the new German Emperor to his army: "Thus we belong to each other, I am the army. Thus were we born for each other. And firmly and inseparably will we hold together, whether God's will gives us peace or storm."

Miss Jennie Smith lays her book aside and crosses the parlor to straighten out the red plush rolling pin, which has become askew on the wall. The red plush matches exactly the suite of seven pieces of parlor furniture. The crayon of Grandfather Smith beams upon her. She looks at the window to see whether the transparent view of Niagara Falls was properly dusted on Saturday morning. She sees Mayme Parker come out of Lulu Martin's house, two blocks away, in Magnolia street. Mayme is almost running; you could tell that she would be running if it were not Sunday. She has a book in her hand. It is the ghost.

She dashes up the Smith porch and into the parlor, hardly saying howdyedo to the elder Smiths.

"I've got it, Jen, I've got it," she whispers hoarsely. "You can read it next and then I've gotta lend it to Mrs. Williams. Listen!"

She opens the book and reads:

"No, no, never," she whispers. "There is a grave between us—there is an open grave between us!" Jen Smith can scarcely resist grabbing the book.

*The Quick or the Dead*; that is the ghost that rises between the reader and *The Ghost Garden*, and it will not down. That was a triangle story, with one living man, one living woman and a dead man's memory. Barbara Pomfret, coming home in the rain; Barbara Pomfret, locked in the church and wailing to the dead Valentine; Barbara Pomfret, losing her wedding ring in the ashes of the hearth and sending John Dering away in the last paragraph—these were blood and fire and real ghosts; and *The Ghost Garden* cannot make a middle aged reviewer get a chill within two inches of his marrow.

Some things never come back, and Youth is one of them. Literary form improves with age, but so does cheese. Literary fire is hard to relight after thirty years, and *The Quick or the Dead* was an all-consuming flame.

Read *The Ghost Garden*, which is pleasant, and then go up to the attic and dig out Amelie Rives's furious little novel of the lost year '88.

THE GHOST GARDEN. BY AMELIE RIVES (PRINCESS TROUBETSKOY). Frederick A. Stokes Company. \$1.50.